

Bristol ChangeUp Consortium

Good practice Equalities guide for working with groups and people



This guide sets out some of the practical issues that are important in your aim to be inclusive about how you involve, communicate with, and work with groups and people. The following issues are covered:

- 1) Staff / Board attitudes and skills
- 2) Providing accessible information
- 3) Organising inclusive events
- 4) Information sharing
- 5) Consultation
- 6) Monitoring and evaluation
- 7) Longer term capacity issues

1) STAFF / BOARD ATTITUDES AND SKILLS

Attitudes can have a significant impact on the accessibility of member groups (written or face to face). ChangeUp Consortium organisations should consider providing equality awareness training to those engaged at a variety of levels so that people understand and promote equality – not everyone involved will have experience or understanding of equalities issues.

Anyone directly or indirectly involved in ChangeUp Consortium organisations should be offered training. Equality training and awareness also needs to be refreshed regularly, as the issues and acceptable standards change over time. Training should include discussion on what hinders or encourages equalities groups to access and benefit from services provided by ChangeUp Consortium organisations.

Attitudes to groups and individuals can create barriers or can enable participation. There are many issues to be aware of when communicating with groups, and the most important are:

- to avoid making inappropriate assumptions
- to avoid any discrimination in their language or behaviour
- to avoid any approach which can be seen to be patronising

ChangeUp consortium organisations should be familiar with the good practice and etiquette examples provided throughout this section. Being trained in equalities issues, and the use of this guidance can help, but the best people to provide advice are the groups who we provide services for – they are the experts.

ChangeUp Consortium organisations should also be aware of how, and where, to seek help to access information and how to ensure the views from a wide range of their memberships is sought, not just by referring to the usual ‘representatives.’

2) PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

The ways in which you provide information can have a major impact on whether equalities groups benefit from the services of ChangeUp Consortium organisations.

Information should always be provided in a way that is easily understood and allows the widest access to it.

There are a number of common problems with information prepared when communicating with groups ^{*a)} the **format of the materials** can be a major barrier: too English-based, written in a dry manner and particularly difficult for some groups to respond to. Documents can be off-putting and regularly too dull and bureaucratic.

There is often a lack of **translated** information (as well as insufficient interpreters, a lack of understanding of how to use these effectively and a lack of funding for this). Groups cannot enable their own members to participate meaningfully if they do not know the language or have access to the appropriate equipment, technology or support.

The **lack of imagination** in the process: information is often not provided in places seen to be appropriate to groups; or there is a

perceived lack of willingness to consider alternative means of information provision.

The need for plain language

Information should be in plain language, which is jargon-free and straightforward, easy to read and understand. *b) the Plain English Campaign can provide advice about this.

You should not refer to structures or systems which groups may not be familiar with. The same applies to terms that groups will not understand unless they are involved with strategic processes.

The need to write clearly applies to all of the written materials. This includes not only paper documents, but also PowerPoint presentations and any materials or resources used in meetings. Feedback from meetings (including minutes and action notes) should also be clear.

If you put questions in writing for written responses, you should make clear exactly what information you are looking for. You should break long documents down into separate, manageable sections, and provide background information where this is needed.

Appropriate language

It is important that the way your materials are written (and the language used) reflect a clear commitment to equality. They should never imply that discrimination or exclusion is acceptable or inevitable. This applies to all parts of the material – the text of documents, the images on covers and the examples used. Graphics and designs of materials should never stereotype or caricature groups.

ChangeUp Consortium organisations should be aware that using discriminatory language can make it seem that the participation of certain groups is less valued. Examples of this include referring to women as "girls" or to disabled people as "the disabled" and can exclude or disempower them.

Practical steps to accessible information

You should provide all of your material in a range of formats. For written materials, a minimum of 12-point type should be used (14 where possible). Addressing the following points will make documents easier for all respondents to access:

- using clear fonts (sans serif is recommended by the Plain English Campaign)
- using medium or bold type
- avoiding the use of italicised fonts
- even type spacing
- avoiding hyphenation
- using appropriate colours to allow contrast

Further considerations include:

- text with poor vertical spacing can be difficult to read, so the space between the lines is as important as the size of the typeface
- paper should be matt, not glossy as unwanted reflections from glossy paper can make even clearly printed text difficult to read
- you should print only on one side of the paper or on paper which is heavy enough to prevent the print bleeding through
- colour and background styles should be used carefully, for example, highlighting text in a colour or using highly stylised backgrounds may make it very hard to read the text

Using clear language is also important if information is to be translated. Avoid idioms, slang and colloquialisms. Avoid using any terms or references that may be offensive to particular cultures or religions. When in any doubt about the languages to use, or other issues relating to translation, it is best to seek specialist advice.

Groups serving people with learning disabilities may require information in easy-read. Pictures, symbols and graphics can make information more accessible and can make material clearer for anyone who finds formal written consultation problematic.

Groups serving people with visual impairments may require copies of written documents in Braille or Moon, in large print (at least 16 point) or on audiotape or floppy disk.

If you are sending information on disk, the entire document should use one common typeface, such as "Arial", which most people will have. You should completely avoid using symbols from other fonts (even popular fonts such as Wingdings). Recipients may not have these on their computer and it may cause confusion. Disk copies should not contain other layout devices (such as boxes) as these do not necessarily appear on screen or print in the same way on all computers. Where layout is critical, Adobe Acrobat is a good choice, but bear in mind that you may have to let users know how to access this programme. It is freely available from www.adobe.com.

Although Microsoft Word is by far the most popular word processing software smaller groups may not use this programme. Some groups use Apple Macintosh, rather than Microsoft Windows-based operating systems. Always offer alternative versions of material, such as rich text format, or raw (plain) text where you are using disk (or internet) delivery.

Any written documents should let recipients know (in appropriate formats) how to get the material in other formats and what can be supplied. For example, in publications which are produced in English, a number of local authorities now include the title in a range of community languages. There is often a standard panel describing how a copy in another language can be obtained. If you offer this, you should make sure that any phone number given can be answered in an appropriate language, and that the document which you have offered is readily available, or ready for translation. Any video materials used should have subtitles and sign language.

This is not an exhaustive list and you should seek advice from specialist organisations. For example, the RNIB can advise on translation to Braille and how to prepare taped information. Local community interpreting services can provide advice on the main community languages.

Minority ethnic community languages

Groups working with people from minority ethnic groups may require information translated into languages other than English. Some languages in Bristol, in addition to English which are frequently used: Bengali

Chinese
Farsi
Hindi
Kurdish
Polish
Punjabi
Somali
Urdu

Other languages will sometimes be required (for example, British Sign Language, or where refugees or asylum seekers may be involved).

Preparation

Preparation of materials in other formats may take a number of weeks, and this needs to be built in to the timetable of work programmes. Translation and proof reading, for example, take at least six weeks (and may take longer).

You do not always need to have every format available at the start of every communication with member groups but you do need to be ready, however, in every case, to respond quickly to requests for another format. You can then get the material prepared and delivered in enough time for those who need it to respond, or anticipate extending the response deadline.

The main consideration is to make sure that the information is appropriate, relevant and accessible to all groups (including different age groups). This will require a range of complementary approaches.

3) ORGANISING INCLUSIVE EVENTS

Where meetings and events are held, there are a range of access issues. For larger events, it may be worthwhile having a planning group which includes local reps and/or member groups along with representatives of equalities groups to consider how appropriate the facilities are.

You should always provide information about the venue and other arrangements, and ask groups who want to participate to let you

know in advance what their individual requirements are. One means of doing this is to include a space on registration forms inviting groups to specify their requirements.

Preparation for staff, speakers and facilitators

An event is more likely to be successful when all who will participate are well prepared. Everyone involved should be briefed on equality awareness, and should understand its principles. They should also know how and where to get information or help which they cannot provide.

It is important that those who are facilitating a discussion or other group activity should:

- ensure that participants are comfortable
- allow all participants to have a say
- be clear about how they will challenge discriminatory attitudes or behaviours
- ensure that the activities, resources and timing are appropriate
- explain how the activity fits in the overall aims of your organisation

They also need to be prepared to listen to groups (whether or not they agree with the issues raised) and to seek clarification of any issues that they do not understand.

It is also important to check that invited "experts" (for example speakers) are comfortable with the fact that their contribution may be challenged by participants who have a great deal of personal or practical expertise and experience of the issues.

Physical access

The location of any meeting or event should be accessible to people with a range of impairments. Again, although it is impossible to provide an exhaustive checklist, some examples include that:

- ✓ The venue should be on an accessible bus route
- ✓ Approaches to the venue should be well lit

- ✓ There should be step-free access to and within the venue through the main door.
- ✓ The entrance should be wide enough for a wheelchair user (both manual and electric) and should not have heavy doors.
- ✓ Ramps should not be steep.
- ✓ There should be sufficient parking at the venue and this should be close to the entrance.
- ✓ Consideration needs to be given to the surfaces, contrast and obstacles for people with visual impairments.
- ✓ Good lighting is important for visually impaired people and for interpreters and lip speakers.
- ✓ The height of reception desks, lift buttons, telephones, etc. should be suitable for use by wheelchair users.
- ✓ The toilets and lifts should be appropriate for disabled people, and alarms should be provided.
- ✓ There should be verbal and Braille indications in the lifts.
- ✓ There should be appropriate and sufficient signage and staff should be prepared to provide assistance, if requested.
- ✓ The distance between rooms / areas should be short, as distance may be difficult for people with mobility impairments.
- ✓ Different types of chair (e.g. with and without arms) should be provided.
- ✓ There should be suitable fire alarms for hearing impaired people (or staff available to assist).
- ✓ There should be enough stewards to provide information and meet other requests. There will be a particular need at key times, such as the start and end of the event, if groups sub-divide for discussion, over breaks.

Undertaking an access audit

One way of checking physical access is by undertaking an access audit before an event. Some disability organisations, such as Centres for Independent Living, or local Access Panels, can advise on this. An access audit is undertaken by a trained and experienced specialist, and generally covers a range of issues at the venue, including, for example:

- physical access
- seating
- signage
- lighting

- amplification
- sight lines
- means of emergency escape

You must avoid buildings that cannot be used by disabled people. If a building has access, but there are some remaining issues, you should let participants know.

Location, transport and expenses

It is also important to consider the geographical location of venues so not to exclude people because of this; it is important to use accessible venues in all parts of the area. You should also consider the provision of transport to events, and advise participants if you are able to reimbursing costs; not addressing transport and expenses issues can be a barrier to people on low incomes. There may also be financial barriers for people who have to give up paid work to participate. Wherever possible, reimburse out-of-pocket expenses on the day of the meeting or event.

The physical safety of locations and the availability of safe transport and parking are also important. You should always provide information on public transport and safety, along with a map of the area. Participants who are concerned about their personal safety at location or getting to and from the venue, may not be willing to attend evening events.

The timing of events

The timing of meetings and events is also important. You should make sure that these do not coincide with major events for a particular community (e.g. a religious event or festival).

People who have childcare or other caring responsibilities can be excluded from early morning or evening meetings. For adults with school-age children, day events should end at a time which allows them to collect their children. Children of school age and people who are working will often not be able to attend daytime events.

Choosing a venue suitable to the audience

Venues used need to be a place where people will be comfortable and confident expressing their views. It needs to be safe, accessible,

appropriate and familiar to participants. People with little experience of formal meetings may be uncomfortable with "business" meeting methods, or venues such as conference centres. A suitable room should be made available for prayer, if required.

Caring responsibilities

It is important to consider crèche facilities or other forms of childcare support, particularly at events involving women. A number of organisations can provide crèches at events. You should only use registered childcare providers (who can be contacted via local authority social work services) who will also take into account all relevant Child Protection considerations. Crèche provision should be accessible to disabled children and should use materials that reflect a focus on equality. The crèche should also take account of the needs of children from minority ethnic communities (including their language requirements).

Before the event, you should provide information about the crèche to parents so that you can make any changes needed or answer questions that they have. If you intend to separate children by age groups, you should make this clear to parents before they register.

Some parents may prefer not to use a crèche but to make their own childcare arrangements. You should provide the option to do this and to have the costs reimbursed. Has your neighbourhood partnership board prepared a policy on this (for example, a maximum cost, or a need for parents to use a registered childminder)? If so, make it clear at the start. If the policy is likely to mean that some people cannot take part, you should consider, on a case by case basis, how that can be addressed.

Some participants may have other care responsibilities. You should consider how to provide support with any additional costs (or practical issues) which participants face because of your aims to involve them.

Communication

You should always consider the best means of communication, both in presentations at events and in discussion groups, i.e. some people from minority ethnic groups may require an interpreter. These are generally available through local community interpreting services.

People with hearing impairments may require a British Sign Language interpreter or a lip speaker. Some participants may need a deafblind guide. You should use only trained interpreters and always contact them in good time to explain your requirements. If you have not worked with interpreters before, you should talk about how the process will work in practice (for example, how you will identify the person who will be using their service).

You should use a microphone and provide a hearing induction loop or infrared sound amplification system. Bear in mind that you should also use a microphone not only for the speakers' contributions, but also to amplify questions asked by those attending the meeting or event. Test all equipment prior to the event.

Notetakers should be provided in groups, as it is very difficult to take notes while concentrating on an interpreter. Copies of the notes can be distributed with the Action Points or Minutes.

Bear in mind the need for good practice and etiquette in all your communication. Examples include:

- speaking directly to a participant when they are using an interpreter
- speaking at an appropriate speed
- keeping your hands away from your mouth and avoiding eating when someone is interpreting what you are saying or lip reading
- not shouting at hearing impaired people
- providing assistance only when this is desired
- not patting or feeding a guide dog
- not leaning on a person's wheelchair
- sitting to talk with a wheelchair user

Again, this is not an exhaustive list, it provides some examples of the ways in which you can improve participation.

Refreshments and arrangements for eating

Some groups and individuals may have particular requirements for food or refreshments, for example:

- some will require vegetarian food
- some foods may be forbidden to particular groups

- some people may have specific dietary requirements for health reasons

You should identify any requirements beforehand and take these into account – only use caterers who can accommodate specific requests. Check with the caterer on the day (even where requirements have been properly specified in advance), that the food provided is the food you requested. It is worth reminding caterers that requirements for vegan or vegetarian foods apply not only to sandwiches and quiches, but also to cakes and biscuits. A high proportion of any refreshments should be meat-free. Different foods should be on separate plates and clearly labelled. Make sure that sufficient serving spoons are provided. You should provide water and juice along with tea and coffee and you should not provide alcohol.

Buffet arrangements will be inappropriate for some disabled people (e.g. wheelchair users and others with difficulties walking or balancing), as it will be impossible to gather food and eat without a seat and a table. Some disabled people have restricted hand movements and may require cups with handles or drinking straws and you should also provide these. People who have guide dogs will almost certainly require refreshments for the dog (e.g. water) and you should provide this. Again, you should check with participants in advance.

Women-only groups

At events involving women (particularly Muslim women) where there is discussion in mixed sex groups, you should offer the option of a women-only group. Do not assume, however, that all women will want to participate in this way.

Specific support

Some participants will bring someone with them to give them particular support or personal assistance. When assessing the number of participants (for refreshments or allocating spaces) you should count these individuals. You should also count others, such as interpreters.

Always bear in mind when you are arranging events that people will have a wide range of individual needs. While you should never make

assumptions about these needs, the best way to identify them is to ask participants to specify their requirements in advance. This will allow you to make the most appropriate arrangements and help to avoid finding on the day that some people cannot take part.

4) INFORMATION SHARING

It is good practice, in any event, **to make the views that have been expressed available to everyone**. You can provide for this by either:

- making the responses available in a central location
- providing copies on request

It is important, however, that if you intend to do this, you make it clear to respondents at the start. Some individuals or groups may wish (for a number of reasons) not to be identified. An obvious example is where an individual or group may face victimisation if they were identified. Other examples may include people with medical or mental health needs who do not wish this to be identified, or people who make suggestions that they do not wish to make public. You must offer the opportunity for responses to remain confidential and respect their **confidentiality** totally.

Where a summary of responses is prepared, check thoroughly before publication that the report does not identify (directly or indirectly) respondents who wish to remain anonymous.

5) CONSULTING WITH GROUPS

From time to time ChangeUp Consortium organisations need to consult with their membership. When consulting with member groups it has been identified that consultation is time-consuming; responding to consultation documents needs additional time so that materials can be considered properly. This can be an issue for any member groups, but may be particularly important for equalities groups. There are a range of reasons for this, including:

- the need to obtain translated materials for their own members
- the need to convene special meetings of their wider community members

- the need to avoid specific religious holidays

The best way to make sure that equalities groups will be able to respond is to consult with them about how much time they will need before you set a deadline. They will therefore be aware of your timetable restraints too.

Providing feedback

Groups have identified that the lack of feedback from their input is a major source of frustration. You should feed back the outcome of actions carried forward from meetings / events to participants and the reasons, as far as possible, for including or not including their views.

The format and dissemination of feedback is just as important as the meetings and events you hold. All of those who took part should be aware of how to get information about the outcome. You should also consider whether, and how, you will involve member groups in monitoring and reviewing policy changes that have been implemented as a result of their views.

Reviewing the process

Changeup Consortium organisations should regularly ask local groups about the processes they use to involve their members and suggestions for improvement in the future; groups can provide invaluable information for future planning.

Consultation fatigue

Many groups now feel that they are being consulted on everything. Equalities groups receive many invitations to participate in consultation on a range of issues, because organisations recognise that it is important to identify their views. They will not, however, always be able to take part. A lack of time and resources may mean that groups have to prioritise and respond only to issues that are centrally relevant to them. This should not, however, stop you inviting them to participate. Groups themselves should be allowed to decide whether they wish to respond. Be flexible – even if your consultation needs a written response, an organisation which does not have the time or resources to do this may be able to provide their views succinctly in a single telephone call.

6) MONITORING AND EVALUATION

You should carry out both an internal review of how your organisation is performing and, where possible, discuss it with those who have taken part. It is also a good idea to review who actually took part in your organisation's activities / services to see whether there are any patterns or obvious gaps. This may help to pinpoint any groups / members which were not reached by the methods you used.

It may also be worth looking at the effect of the methods on the outcomes. If, for example, one method provided a set of views or respondents which varied significantly from others, you should consider whether this is due to differences in the method or actual differences in the views.

Monitoring and evaluation not only measure how well you are doing, but also help you to be more effective.

Monitoring and evaluating your services will help you assess how well you are doing in order to help you do it better. It is about asking what has happened and why – what is and what is not working. It is about using evaluation to learn more about an organisation's activities, and then using what has been learnt.

Monitoring

Monitoring is about collecting information that will help you answer questions about how your organisation is functioning; it is important that this information is collected in a planned, organised and routine way. You can then use the information you collect to help you evaluate.

Records, notes, and anecdotal evidence becomes monitoring when information is collected routinely and systematically checked against a plan. The information might be about activities or services, your users, or about outside factors affecting your organisation.

Monitoring information is collected at specific times: daily, monthly or quarterly. At some point you need to bring this information together so that it can answer questions such as:

- how well are we doing?

- are we doing the right things?
- what difference are we making?

At this point you are starting to evaluate.

Evaluation

While monitoring is routine and ongoing, evaluation is an in-depth study, taking place at specific points in the life of the partnerships activities. Evaluation has two main purposes: for learning and for development.

Evaluation is about using monitoring and other information you collect to make judgements about your services and activities. It is also about using the information to make changes and improvements.

Evaluation aims to answer agreed questions and to make a judgement against specific criteria therefore data must be collected and analysed systematically, and its interpretation considered carefully. You should assess value, and then action plan.

There are many different perspectives and approaches to evaluation. Answering questions such as 'Why are we doing it?' 'Who is the evaluation for?' and 'What are the key issues to address?' will help you decide whether you wish to self-evaluate or to have an external evaluation. The questions will help you to think about what you want to focus on. For example, this could be:

- the structure of your organisation and how it works
- how the organisation provides its services and activities
- how member groups experience what you do
- what changes or benefits your services bring about.

Why should you do it?

For accountability: to show others that you are effective

- To identify which groups have been involved / benefited from your organisation's services.
- To show funders and stakeholders that you are using resources appropriately.
- To identify strengths / successes and weaknesses / gaps

- For learning and development
- To demonstrate achievements.
- To help you decide if / how your services should continue

If you have asked the right questions, an evaluation will tell you not only what you have achieved, but also how you did it and what was most effective. It will help you find the areas where improvement or change is needed, and help you to provide the best service to and with local people and groups.

7) LONGER-TERM ISSUES/CAPACITY BUILDING

Recognising that time, resources and longer-term work with groups and organisations will enable them to become more involved in the sector's wider activities and more strategic processes.

There is a value in building good relationships with groups especially when they are likely to be affected by citywide and local policy proposals and decisions. There are many benefits of working with equalities communities especially; for example, to:

- identify priorities
- provide advice
- discuss ideas
- formulate policy proposals
- monitor the impact on communities when policy is implemented

The capacity of groups needs to be built up over time to develop these arrangements. ChangeUp Consortium organisations need to understand their roles and limitations. Bridges need to be robust to reduce the cynicism which can develop from persistent exclusion or which deny the expertise of member groups.

Sources / References

Information adapted from the Scottish Government publications:

'Good practice guidance consulting with equalities groups' (2002)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2002/06/14850/5334>

*a) Reid Howie Associates after the grassroots consultation events
(*Equality Unit, Scottish Executive 2001*):

*b) The Plain English Campaign: <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>